



Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Rice Production

... of growing importance

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Media Release

More Than One Reason to Reduce Water Use

Current research into improved water use efficiency in rice crops is driven by far more than the debate over environmental flows. The irrigated farming industry must face the prospect of reduced access to water for a number of reasons.

Irrigators, as much as the rest of the community, want to see our rivers get all the water they need to stay healthy, and increased environmental flows will play an important part in this.

However, increased environmental flows is just one of a number of factors set to influence the amount of water available for farming in the future.

Looming large on the horizon is the relatively unknown consequence of global climate change. Predictions of increased temperatures and reduced rainfall due to atmospheric pollution are a major cause for concern worldwide.

Another factor influencing the future availability of irrigation water is linked to the issue of salinity. Major tree planting programmes in the upper catchments of the Murray Darling basin are designed to address the salinity problem downstream. While these programmes have major benefits for both farmers and the environment, the fact is this will reduce the run-off in these areas and result in less water entering storages such as Burrinjuck Dam.

Natural cycles in global climate may also play a part in the issue. Research shows that the second half of the twentieth century was measurably wetter than the first half. This could be an indication that we are about to enter the dry half of a 100-year natural cycle.

Rice farmers must also come to terms with the obvious fact that, as this resource becomes increasingly scarce, competition for water in the coming decades will become ever more fierce, placing upward pressure on its value.

In the end, the drive to increase water use efficiency on irrigation farms is not simply a reaction to the needs of the environment or pressure from environmentalists. It is a scientific and measured response to enable this great farming nation to continue growing the crops that feed the world using the most efficient and sustainable methods on the planet.

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